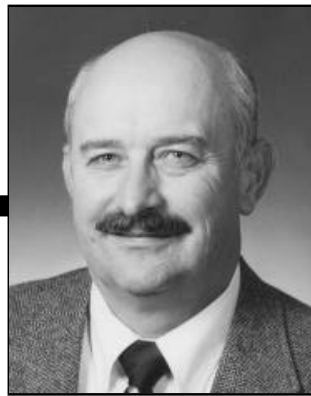




Rep. Mary Skinner



Rep. Jim Clements

14th District



Session Report

Summer 1997

The most efficient session in 40 years

Dear neighbors,

The 1997 legislative session was a landmark. For the first time in 40 years, we completed our work on time. That hasn't happened in a budget-writing year since 1957. Special sessions have been the rule rather than the exception. This year, for the first time in several generations, taxpayers will not pay the extra staffing and workload costs of a special session.

At the same time, we passed major policy initiatives, including **juvenile justice reform, welfare reform and property tax relief.**

This letter outlines highlights of the just-completed session. Please take a moment to read through it. We welcome your views on these and any other issues. If you have concerns or views you'd like to share, or if you need help dealing with a state agency, please call or write. We'll be happy to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Mary Skinner
Mary Skinner (360) 786-7810

Jim Clements
Jim Clements (360) 786-7856

The 1997 Legislature

What the media said:

"Session called a success"

— Yakima Herald-Republic, 4/30/97

"Sweet reason is in full bloom"

— Spokane Spokesman-Review, 5/6/97

"Locke, legislators find sensible ways to work"

— Wenatchee World, 4/29/97

"Bipartisan effort defies predictions of gridlock"

— The News Tribune, 4/28/97

"A legislative session to write home about"

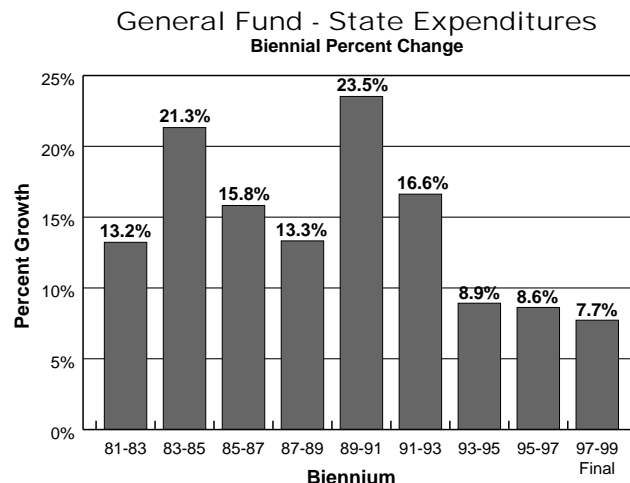
— Seattle Times 4/29/97

"GOP triumph in Legislature"

— Everett Herald, 4/28/97

Spending less, saving more

Our budget for 1997-99 is \$19.07 billion. **This is the smallest state budget increase — 7.7 percent — since 1971.** The final budget is \$150 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit. In the three years since Republicans gained a majority in the state House of Representatives, we have consistently held spending down. And by staying below the 601 lid, we reduce spending that much *more* over time — a considerable savings for taxpayers.



Education remains top priority

We promised to properly fund education, and we have kept our word. Our budget increases education funding by 7.5 percent over the biennium — an increase that stays ahead of enrollment and exceeds the inflation rate. We increased funding in the following specific areas:

► SLICING UP THE BUDGET — PUBLIC SCHOOLS

► Total public school spending

'95-'97	\$8.28 billion
'97-'99	\$8.90 billion

► Annual per-pupil spending

'97	\$4,561 per student
'98	\$4,635 per student
'99	\$4,729 per student

► Specific increases

Teacher salary increases
(3 percent on 7-1-97) — \$176 million

School construction — \$75 million

Technology grants — \$39 million

Instructional materials purchases — \$20 million
(average: \$458 per classroom)

Gifted program funding — \$2.9 million

We also established clear priorities in K-12 education, with an emphasis on academics, discipline and choice. We sharpened the focus on reading in the primary grades with greater teacher training and better assessments to identify students who need early assistance. We gave teachers and school districts more latitude and authority to address discipline and gang problems.

Tomorrow's education at today's prices

We know that young people with college degrees have a better chance of finding family-wage jobs. But working parents are understandably concerned about the rising costs of higher education. This year, we've instituted a program that allows parents to purchase future college credits at current tuition rates.

Parents can purchase up to four full years of college credits as their child matures, and then apply them toward tuition at any of our state colleges. The credits purchased would not shrink over time. What you pay for today is what you will receive tomorrow. This is an excellent way to provide broad access to education for our young people. The program is still being developed, but it should be up and running by next year.

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Restoring justice in the juvenile justice system

We have completely reformed the way we protect our neighborhoods from young criminals. As a member of the House Law and Justice Committee, Mary helped to streamline the bill into a measure that would have bipartisan support. Our juvenile justice bill, which passed both the House and Senate unanimously, enacts the most significant changes in 20 years. This is a major achievement, and a true victory for our citizens.

Here are the highlights:

Accountability — 16- and 17-year-olds will be prosecuted as adults in the following cases: murder, rape, drive-by shooting, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, and any crime in which the offender used a firearm.

New sentencing system — The bill replaces the current sentencing “point system” with sentencing ranges based on two factors: 1) the seriousness of the current offense; and 2) the number of prior felony and misdemeanor sentences.

Sentencing alternatives — The measure includes several alternatives to jail or prison time, including boot camps, home detention, community service, and mandatory school attendance.

Deferred convictions would be replaced with deferred dispositions. Juveniles who agree to this form of probation after a guilty plea or a guilty verdict may substitute community supervision for incarceration. Community supervision may include treatment for drug and alcohol

addiction. Juveniles must comply with all conditions of the deferral or face court-imposed jail time.

Parental involvement — Parents of juvenile offenders will be required to participate in court proceedings involving their children.

Community Juvenile Accountability Act — Grants will be made available to local governments to fund community-based juvenile accountability and intervention programs that meet specified criteria. Juveniles with three or more convictions will be referred to community-based intervention programs.

Housing of juveniles sentenced in adult court — Juvenile offenders under age 18 who are incarcerated in the adult system will be placed in housing units or jail cells separate from adult inmates.

Educating juveniles sentenced to adult prison — Juvenile offenders will be provided with opportunities to achieve either a high school diploma or GED.

Basic Health Plan saved

The state’s Basic Health Plan (BHP), which provides subsidized health insurance for low-income persons in need, was facing a deficit of \$165 million as we entered the 1997 session. Without tying off this shortfall and addressing the reasons why BHP was headed into the red, the program could have been lost.

We were not in favor of raising taxes, as Gov. Lowry had proposed, nor procrastinating with addressing the structural problem of the BHP until next year, as Gov. Locke proposed. Instead, we made some difficult decisions in order to save the Basic Health Plan.

Mary, who serves as vice chair on the House Health Care Committee, helped to pass legislation that closed the deficit, changed the subsidy structure to prevent future deficits, and continued funding for enrollment of about 138,000 people per month. The plan will still allow about 250,000 additional people to be enrolled in the BHP over the next biennium because of the high rate of turnover in the program.



Raef Harrison, 14-year-old son of Anne and Terry Harrison, Yakima, recently served as a legislative page. He was sponsored by Rep. Mary Skinner.

Capital budget

The following local projects were approved for funding in the capital budget for 1997-99:

- Yakima Valley Community College
 - Pedestrian overpass replacement (\$100,000)
 - Hopf Hall Renovation (\$475,400)
 - HVAC repairs (\$789,700)
 - Mechanical repairs (\$876,900)
 - Electrical repairs (\$692,500)
 - Building interior repairs (\$307,000)
 - Minor repairs (\$292,700)
- Yakima Armory site development (\$5.26 million)
- Yakima DSHS office building (\$8.8 million)

Welfare reform

This year saw the culmination of a four-year struggle to reform welfare. The Legislature passed and the governor signed a bill that replaces our broken welfare system with provisions that emphasize personal responsibility and work. Welfare recipients will abide by the following conditions:

- Time limits on benefits (five years)
- Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service
- Child care assistance for working parents
- Job training
- Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits

We also approved language in the budget to create a system of training and licensing for child-care employees, providing more opportunities for low-income citizens to learn these skills.

We have fully funded this program, which we call the Personal Responsibility Act of 1997. Coupled with changes to the federal welfare system, we believe we will help families to free themselves from the cycle of dependency.



Rep. Jim Clements discusses legislative issues during a town hall meeting with constituents earlier this year.

14th District Session Report

Transportation budget 'bare bones' without gas tax increase

Washington's transportation network is facing a crisis that if not addressed will affect our state's economy, jobs and the quality of life we enjoy in the Northwest. It is difficult to move our agriculture products on our farm-to-market road network. There's massive congestion in our urban areas. Our ports have begun to lose market share to other highly competitive West Coast ports who have improved their transportation linkages.

As a member of the House Transportation Policy and Budget Committee, Mary spent considerable time going through the transportation budget line-by-line looking for efficiencies to direct money toward actual highway projects. In the last biennium, savings of up to \$100 million from administration was redirected toward projects. Unfortunately, this year all other possible revenue sources fell severely short of addressing this impending transportation crisis. Our final option was an increase in the gasoline tax. We felt this to be the fairest option because a gas tax is a user fee — paid only by those who use our highways.

The gas tax proposal was introduced with the transportation budget in the Senate. But it wasn't long before an intense media campaign,

much of it generated by talk radio, caused the gas tax proposal to be dropped. As a result, the Legislature passed a bare-bones transportation budget.

The good news is that projects already underway in the Yakima area will continue to be funded, as well as ongoing maintenance. The budget also provides funding for snow and ice removal, crucial to transporting goods to and from the Yakima Valley during the winter. We were also able to secure an additional \$150 million from the state's general fund to expand capacity. We approved a performance audit of the Department of Transportation, which will give us a clearer idea of how to use our existing revenue more efficiently. However, the bad news is that the new transportation budget continues to fall far short of tackling future needs.

The following local improvement projects in the 14th district will continue to receive funding in the transportation budget:

- SR 823 to SR 12 — \$10 million
- SR 82 to Selah — \$8.02 million
- SR 823, Harrison Road to SR 82 — \$1.54 million
- Keys Road intersection — \$80,000

Tax relief

Property taxes

This year, the Legislature approved \$411 million worth of tax cuts. One of our first actions of the session was a vote to prevent an immediate property tax increase in January. We extended a 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy through 1997.

Several other property tax relief measures were passed by the Legislature, but vetoed by the governor. In response, we have placed our proposal on the referendum ballot this fall. The voters will make the final decision on whether to accept \$220 million worth of property tax relief.

Our proposal would make the 4.7 percent state levy reduction permanent. It would limit the property tax "spikes" that result from unexpected

assessment increases. Also, it would limit property tax increases. Currently, state and local governments are allowed to increase property taxes by a maximum of 6 percent each year. Our proposal would limit increases to 6 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower (inflation has been running at about 3 percent).

Small business tax relief

This year, we voted to complete the rollback of a heavy tax increase on small businesses imposed in 1993, during the Lowry administration. The first half of the rollback was passed in 1996 and vetoed by then-Gov. Lowry. The Legislature overrode the veto. We voted for the second half of the rollback this year. The repeal takes effect in July 1998.

We also passed a tax credit for small businesses that clarifies eligibility for tax credits and makes it easier to compute the amount of tax.

Tell us how we can help. . .

Do you need help dealing with a state agency, or need answers on state regulations or laws? One of the more important responsibilities we have as your state representatives is to help you in dealings with the government. Please don't hesitate to call our offices in Olympia, or the legislative hotline, 1-800-562-6000, if we can be of service to you. The state toll-free information hotline, 1-800-321-2808, is another helpful source to assist you in matching your need with the appropriate state agency.

Rep. Mary Skinner (360) 786-7810

Rep. Jim Clements (360) 786-7856

REP. Mary Skinner
REP. Jim Clements
PO BOX 40600
OLYMPIA, WA 98504-0600

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